

Contact: Tom Cook 406-444-1645 Release: Receipt

SOCIETY HONORS NATIVE AMERICAN AND ALL VETERANS WITH EXHIBIT

In battle veterans of all nationalities and walks of life speak the same language – one that keeps their brothers and sisters alive.

“Native Words, Native Warriors,” a new temporary exhibit brought to Montana from the Smithsonian Institution, is a powerful example of how Native Americans used their languages to do just that.

The exhibit, which is being co-sponsored by the Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs, will be at the Society Museum just east of the State Capitol from April 22nd to April 28th, and then taken to venues over the next several months at all of Montana’s seven Native American reservations.

Society Director Richard Sims said he hopes the exhibit will inspire all Montanans to recognize the courage and sacrifice of those who are serving on the battlefields of today as well as those who have served over the years.

“It is a meaningful occasion for the Montana Historical Society to host an event that honors the servicemen and servicewomen from Montana’s seven reservations and twelve tribes,” Sims said. “Their warrior tradition is manifested in all of the Montanans serving in the armed forces today.”

On April 28 from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. at the Society a public reception that will include Native American Veterans Representatives, Lt. Gov. John Bohlinger and others will be held to send off the exhibit to Montana’s reservations.

Jennifer Perez Cole, director of the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs, said Montana is honored to collaborate with the Smithsonian in paying homage to Native Warriors, with special recognition of the vital role native code talkers played in the protection of our country.

“As the director of Indian Affairs for Montana, and as the daughter of a Vietnam War veteran and the granddaughter of a World War Two veteran who survived the Bataan Death March, this exhibit is very special to me and to all the ‘Native Warriors’ of Montana and their families. I welcome and encourage all veterans, their families and communities, to visit this important exhibit as it travels Montana.”

The Smithsonian, of which the Society is an official affiliate, created this exhibit to tell the remarkable story of Indian Marines and soldiers from more than a dozen tribes who used their often coded native languages as a weapon against U.S. enemies. The Society has added to it to tell the Montana story.

The Navajo code talkers during World War Two have received the most recognition, but the exhibit shows that Native Americans were first enlisted to relay messages using their own language during World War One.

Marines and soldiers from the Assiniboiné, Sioux, Navajo, Hopi, Kiowa, Comanche, Choctaw, Cherokee, Meskwaki, Creek, Chippewa, Cree, Sac and Fox, Oneida, Menominee, and Seminole nations all served as code talkers.

The exhibit was curated by George Horse Capture of Great Falls, who is now a member of the Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees.

Sims said the exhibit confronts the now discarded U.S. policy of discouraging and punishing Native American youth even into the 1900s from learning or using their languages.

“It is unremittingly ironic that the very weapon needed by U.S. forces was the very weapon the U.S. government had been trying to dismantle for decades – American Indian languages,” Sims said.

Wal-Mart contributed \$8,000 that will be divided equally between each reservation to allow local tribal leaders and veterans for events using their own ways to honor veterans. Private individuals and groups have also donated money to offset the cost of transporting to and installing the exhibit at each venue, and those who want to contribute can contact the Society.

The exact dates for reservation exhibits and venues have not been set, but publicity will be provided for each showing of the exhibit that will be open to all.